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U. S. Department of Agriculture

Housekeepers' Chat

Thursday, February 21, 1929.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Learn to Read the Label." Information about labels from Food, Drug, and Insecticide Adm'n; menu and recipe from Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletins available:

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The telephone rang. Uncle Ebenezer was on the line.

"Want anything from the store?" he asked.

"Yes, if you please. A jar of raspberry jam, and a bottle of vanilla extract. Are you writing it down?"

"I am," said Uncle Ebenezer. "Raspberry jam and vanilla extract. Anything else?"

"We're out of coffee. Get a can of coffee. That's all."

When Uncle Ebenezer came home he put the packages on the kitchen table.

"Don't tell me I can't get bargains," he said. "Look at this jam. Ever see anything prettier than that? Look at the vanilla extract. The clerk showed me two bottles, both the same price, but this one was much larger than the other. Are you proud of my marketing ability?"

I looked at the Jam.

"Open it," I said. "And taste it."

Uncle Ebenezer did.

"Is it good?" I asked.

"Pretty good," he said. "It tastes a little weak, but it's fair enough. Do you think there's something wrong with it?"

"Read the label," I said. "It doesn't say raspberry jam. It says: COMPOUND PECTIN, SUGAR AND RASPBERRY JAM. PREPARED FROM 20% PECTIN SOLUTION, 55% SUGAR, AND 25% RASPBERRIES, WITH FRUIT ACID ADDED. It's a good food, honestly labeled, but it isn't what I wanted. Raspberry jam is a better product, better tasting and more expensive, than this compound. This product has fewer raspberries in it, and has cheaper ingredients in place of fruit. We'll eat it, but next time, please, get a jar labeled RASPBERRY JAM."

Uncle Ebenezer was crestfallen.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But anyway, there's nothing wrong with this big bottle of vanilla extract. It's a great deal bigger than the other bottle the clerk showed me, and they both cost the same. That's a bargain, isn't it?"

"Uncle Ebenezer," I said. "I really do hate to hurt your feelings, and of course you couldn't be expected to know as much about buying as a housewife does. Go to the cupboard, and get me the empty vanilla extract bottle. Yes, it's that little one."

He brought me the empty bottle. I placed it on the table, beside the new unopened one.

"Look at the label on the little bottle: BLANK BRAND, VANILLA EXTRACT, TWO FLUID OUNCES. Now read the label on the nice big bottle you just brought home: DOE BRAND, VANILLA EXTRACT, ONE FLUID OUNCE. Don't you see what you've done? You bought the bigger bottle, which contains only half as much vanilla extract as the smaller bottle. And both cost the same. Now, if I were buying bottles, instead of flavoring, I suppose I'd be quite pleased with this fancy one, which has false sides. But I am not making a collection of bottles; I want only the extract."

"I see," said Uncle Ebenezer. "If I had read the label, I would have known that the small bottle contained two ounces, while the big one contains only one. I am humiliated and chastened. Next time I'll read the labels. What do you suppose is in the coffee can? Do you suppose, by any chance, it contains coffee?"

"Read the label," I said. "Yes, it contains coffee. Sometimes coffee is mixed with chicory, or with cereals. If it contains chicory, the label must read: COFFEE AND CHICORY. But this is coffee, it says so."

"Good," said Uncle Ebenezer. "I am fast regaining my self-respect. But next time I buy anything for you, I'll read the label."

"You aren't the only one who makes mistakes," I said. "Polly bought me a box of pepper yesterday, a box about twice as large as the one I bought some time ago. She said the clerk showed her two boxes of pepper, and the big one cost only three cents more than the small one."

"I brought you the big one," explained Polly. "I wasn't going to let any grocery salesman gyp me." Well, we looked at the labels, of the new box and the old one, and they both said: CONTENTS TWO OUNCES NET. The smaller box was full, but the large one wasn't. Since they both have a shaker top, which can't be removed, the only way to tell how much they hold is to read the label. You see the smaller box was really three cents cheaper."

"I declare," said Uncle Ebenezer, "Where did you learn all this about labels?"

"From a friend of mine who's working with the Food, Drug, and Insecticide Administration. Any housewife who wants information about food labeling, can get it by writing to the Food, Drug, and Insecticide Administration, at Washington, D. C., explaining just what food she wants to know about. They'll send her any printed matter they have on the subject. Through the enforcement of the various pure food laws, designed to protect us against inferior products, short weight, and so forth, labels are becoming increasingly reliable. Of course, if we don't read the labels -- "

"I protest!" said Uncle Ebenezer. "Next time I'll read the labels, Aunt Sammy. Is that a cherry pie you're concocting?"

"Yes, a cherry pie, but not for today. Tomorrow's the twenty-second of February, and I thought we should have a cherry pie. Anything else you'd like for dinner tomorrow?"

"Spare ribs, stuffed with that bread crumb and apple dressing you make sometimes. May we have that?"

We may, and we shall. We are going to have Roast Stuffed Spare Ribs; Mashed Rutabaga Turnip; String Beans; and Cherry Pie. Just a minute, and I'll tell you how to prepare the Stuffed Spareribs. Seven ingredients, for Stuffed Spareribs:

2 pounds spareribs, in two pieces	1 teaspoon salt
1-1/2 cups dry bread crumbs	2 tablespoons butter, and
2 tart apples, diced	1 tablespoon chopped parsley
1 onion, sliced	

Everybody have seven ingredients, for Stuffed Spareribs? I'll repeat then (Repeat)

Select well-padded ribs. Wipe them with a damp cloth. Spread one length of the ribs out flat, Sprinkle with salt, and a small amount of pepper. Brown the onion and parsley in the butter, then add the other ingredients, and mix well. Place this mixture over the ribs, cover with the other length of rib, taking care that the bones are directly over each other. Sew the pieces of rib together. Sprinkle the outside of both ribs with salt, and lightly with flour. Cook the ribs in a hot oven until golden brown, then add a small quantity of water, cover, and continue the cooking about 1-1/2 hours, or until done.

To repeat the menu, for February 22; Roast Stuffed Spare Ribs, Mashed Rutabaga Turnip, String Beans, and Cherry Pie.

Tomorrow: "The Nursery School" or "Training the Appetite of the New Generation."

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